MSA Computer Support Newsletter

Computer Support Newsletter Audience

A note to our many readers......This newsletter is published mainly to inform MSA employees of Information Technology (IT) news and happenings. Much of the newsletter will relate to the local user base. If you are NOT at Stoneville, some of the contained items may not be relevant to you

Email all questions and comments to:
MSA-Helpdesk@ars.usda.gov

Protecting Your System from Virus Invasions

When it comes to fighting viruses, it's *much* better to take the proper precautions to avoid the virus in the first place than it is to be careless and have to fight the virus later on. Someday, you're going to start taking all the proper precautions. Will that day be today, or the day *after* you lose all your data to a virus?

The most important steps you can take in warding off viruses, is to use antivirus software and to keep it up to date. If you bought your computer in the past three years, chances are that it shipped with some antivirus software preinstalled on it. That would be a good thing, except that antivirus software stops being current the day it's installed on your machine. If you don't update the virus definitions regularly — at least once a week — you're really not protected. Read more on antivirus software here.

Here are some more steps to add to your arsenal of virus-fighting actions:

- **Virus-scan every floppy disk and CD that goes into your computer.** Many antivirus software packages let you right-click on a file to scan it instantly. It takes only a few seconds to scan your floppys or CDs, so there's really no excuse.

- **Treat attachments with care.** Don't open unexpected files or attachments from people you DO know until you've confirmed why they sent them, and don't ever accept files or attachments from people you DON'T know.

- **Don't accept downloads from strange Web sites.** Unless the Web site has a good reason for sending you something to download, you're wise to reject those automatic download boxes that sometimes pop up. If there's a legitimate reason for making you download some kind of program, Web sites usually tell you well in advance and give you the opportunity to download it yourself rather than force it on you.

- **After you download files, scan them.** Make sure that you scan all files or programs you download before you install or run them. Even if your favorite Web site claims that they virus-scan everything, take the few extra seconds to run your own virus scan before installing new software. Likewise, you should also take the time to scan all files sent from coworkers and friends before opening them.

- **Check your macros at the door.** Make sure that any programs on your computer that use macros (most commonly Word, Excel, and WordPerfect) have their macro-related security settings set to their highest setting. This setting alerts you to the presence of a macro before it's executed, giving you a chance to run a virus scan on the file before executing the macro — and to possibly avert disaster. To change the macro security level in Word 2003 and Excel 2003, choose Tools --> Macro --> Security from the menu bar.

Groupwise Q&As

How do I save email messages to my hard drive?

Normal review of the MSA GroupWise mail servers has revealed that the disk storage space is nearly full. The need is not critical yet, but a requests has gone out for users to clean their mailboxes of unnecessary items and file attachments. Although we have set no limitations on mailbox space, when moved into the HQ mail system, the storage space for each user will be limited. This clean out action will have to be done sooner or later.

Begin now, so you won't be rushed when the time comes.

When saving email messages from Groupwise to your computer's hard drive, you have two options:

- Save each file individually to your hard drive
- Save multiple files all at once (ideal for moving entire Groupwise folders)

To be absolutely sure your Groupwise mailbox is backed up nightly, turn your PC off.

Email Best Practices

Electronic mail, or email, has become one of the most common ways for people and businesses to send and receive messages using computers. Although many people believe email is the greatest invention in the history of humanity, it can have it's drawbacks. Some email disadvantages are as follows:

- **Message Size Limits** — Many email programs have a hard time with very large emails. Processing large email messages puts a strain on the email server, especially if they are mailed to a large number of people at once. MSA Computer Support imposes a 10MB file attachment limitation on all email messages. If you need to send large files or get large files from others, we recommend using the File Upload Utility. The File Upload Utility will allow you to upload a file up to 100MB to a server for download by someone else. Click here for instructions.

- **Blocked File Attachments** — Not all files can be sent by email. In an effort to thwart virus attacks, some email providers have begun to block file extension that are capable of executing as a virus. MSA Computer Support blocks over 50 file extensions. If an email has an attachment

that is blocked, both the email and the attachment are blocked. The recipient of the email will receive notification that the file was blocked, for security reasons, you will not. See the sidebar for a list of blocked attachments.

- **File Formats** — Many email programs give you an option to send your email in both plain text and HTML, or in HTML only. Using the HTML option is not a good idea as it causes even the simplest text message to balloon to an unnecessary large size and it may not be readable by every email system.

Tips and tricks for Successful Emailing

Try to avoid file attachments and use plain text in email messages. If you have to send an attachment try one of these helpful tips:

- If formatting is important, PDF is the most efficient and widely used format.

- If you plan to share pictures in a Microsoft Office document, you may want to reduce the size or dimension of your pictures to work more efficiently. Click here for instructions.

Click here for a list of file extensions blocked by Groupwise

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ARS NEWS

ARS Net / Share Point

What is ARS Net / SharePoint?

ARS Net is an ARS intranet platform which utilizes the Microsoft SharePoint suite of software.

SharePoint is a secure on-line virtual workspace that provides an ideal team collaboration environment.

A *Sharepoint team site* is a website that provides essential storage and collaboration space for documents, information and ideas. These sites help groups of people share information and work together more efficiently.

Sharepoint Features

- integrates with Microsoft Office programs
- accounts for all ARS employees and collaborators
- invitation access control
- custom site
- document libraries
- alerts
- task lists
- discussion boards
- contact lists
- announcements
- shared calendars
- surveys
- meeting workspaces

View the SharePoint orientation video at:

http://sp.arsnet.usda.gov/ training/orientation.swf

Win 98 Updates to Expire in June 2006

Unsupported operating systems such as all versions of Windows NT and Windows 95 may not be used on the Government Computer Network.

Windows 98 and Windows 98 Second Edition support is scheduled to end on June 30, 2006. At this time any ARS computer running these versions of Win-

dows will have to be removed from the Government Computer Network. This means the affected computers can not be used for internet access, email or file sharing.

If you are using a computer running Windows 98, plan ahead and upgrade to a newer computer before June 2006.

Read more on Microsoft Support Lifecycle at

http://support.microsoft.com/ default.aspx?scid=fh; [ln];lifecycle

Adobe 7.0 Upgrade

Two years ago, Headquarters purchased 1575 licenses of Adobe Acrobat Professional that had a 1 year maintenance rider to upgrade to 6.0. MSA Computer Support deployed 182 of these licenses to all administrative staff and select scientist. The Adobe 6.0 that is now deployed **DOES NOT** have an upgrade option.

Although ARS prides it's self on being at the forefront of software utilization, with the current budget as it is, HQ does not have the funding to purchase another quantity of Adobe licenses for the field, nor do they feel the new features warrant the upgrade.

Download the free Adobe 7.0 Reader

Read more on Adobe 7.0 new features at

http://www.adobe.com/products/ acrobatpro/newfeatures.html

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